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Teacher Feedback: Educational Guidance in Different School Contexts

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Abstract

The study of teacher feedback as a tool of educational guidance is an international concern in educational systems and school contexts. This study explores the students' perceptions about the teachers' feedback as an educational guidance practice to develop academic skills and life competences. The methodological plan used included collecting socio-demographic data and the answers to two open questions about students' perceptions of the teachers' feedback about the students' work. One hundred and eighteen students attending regular and vocational education, between 14 and 19 years of age participated in this study. According to the results, the students consider the teachers' feedback as practical educational guidance. Teachers' feedback could help in the design of the students' life project in the 21st century.

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1. Introduction

School experiences develop academic skills and competences and can change the students' life trajectories (Burchinal & Peisner-Feinberg, 2002). In a society of diversity and constant change, teachers have a strong influence on the personal and social development of their students (Martins & Carvalho, 2013). Teacher feedback seems to be a fundamental aspect on learning outcomes and student engagement, encouraging student awareness of

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their achievement and learning needs. Considering previous studies developed in a broader project (*Feedback, Identity and School Trajectories: Dynamics and Consequences*, PTDC/CPE-PEC/121238/2010, funded by the Foundation for Science and Technology, Portugal), this study explores the students' perceptions of the teachers' feedback in terms of what the students consider to be useful or not useful when a teacher assesses their work. Focusing on the Hattie and (Timperley Hattie & Timperley, 2007) model of feedback, we consider the students' perceptions about the degree of utility about four types of feedback: self, task, process and self-regulation. Based on this model, this study considers feedback on the self as being one which, focusing on the student person, "expresses positive or negative evaluations and affect about the student" and does not necessarily contain task-related information [3, p. 96]. Task feedback is concerned with whether work is correct or incorrect, and "may include directions to acquire more, different, or correct information" [3, p. 90]. Feedback focusing on the process is aimed at the processing of information/learning, seeking student understanding of information. Feedback focusing on self-regulation is defined as an encouragement that may engage student self-evaluation or self-confidence in their work. In educational literature, feedback is described as an important aspect in the relationship between teacher and student (Black & Wiliam, 1998; Black, Harrison, Lee, Marshall & Wiliam, 2002; Hattie, 2009). Feedback, in an educational paradigm and in its cognitive dimension, can be understood as the provision of information by the teacher on aspects of their students' knowledge (Hattie & Timperley, 2007), and which also has a clear impact on student learning performance and self-regulated learning (Kluger & DeNisi, 1996; 2004; Zimmermann & Schunk, 2001; 2007). The potential impact of teacher feedback on student learning guidance and its outcomes is well documented in literature (Hattie & Timperley, 2007). According to Santana (2009), educational guidance must be integrated in the curriculum: a) to help students in their learning process and b) to support the teachers in their teaching process; the final goal is to improve the quality of education. The teachers' role is to create a set of experiences to facilitate educational guidance in order to supply the educational needs as well as the development of a vocational identities (Martins & Carvalho, 2012a, 2012b; Santana & Feliciano, 2009; Santana, Feliciano & Jiménez, 2009) and consequently life design projects (Savickas, 2012). The full meaning of teacher feedback can be understood as guidance information that reflects on future school trajectories. (William, 2011). Teacher feedback is a powerful pedagogical tool for promoting interaction in educational guidance between teachers and students (Hattie & Timperley, 2007; Santana, 2013). Therefore, teacher feedback may be useful in the construction of a personally meaningful and socially valuable student life projects (Guichard, 2010; Santana, Feliciano & Santana, 2012).

2. Methodology

The design of our research belongs to the interpretative paradigm to meet the goal of this study: to understand the students' perceptions of the teachers' feedback in regular and vocational educational contexts. Our research is essentially characterized by applying two open questions to assess the students' perceptions of the teachers' feedback in terms of what they consider to be valuable and not valuable when a teacher assesses their work.

2.1 Participants

A total of 118 pupils, 88 boys and 30 girls between the ages of 14 and 19 ($M = 16.02$ and $SD = 1.54$) in 9th grade participated in the study. These pupils were in two different educational school contexts: 59 students in regular education and 59 in vocational education. The 9th grade of the regular education system is compulsory and free, designed for pupils until 16 years of age. Vocational education is part of compulsory education, equivalent to 9th grade of regular education, which is intended for students who are 15 years old or older with early school leaving trajectories or at risk of dropping out.

2.2 Instruments and procedure

The methodological plan used included, collecting socio-demographic data and the answers of two open questions about the students' perceptions of the teachers' assessment feedback: (1) "What comments do you value when a teacher assesses your work?" and (2) "What comments do you not value when a teacher assesses your work?". These questions are, of course, open to interpretation, depending on the perceptions that the students have of the teachers' feedback. The students answer the open questions in class. The information collected was analyzed by

content analysis process (Bardin, 2011).

3. Results

The emergent categories from the content analysis of the students' answers are grouped into four types of feedback (Hattie & Timperley, 2007). Tables 1 and 2 present these emergent categories.

Table 1. Emergent categories: "What comments do you value when a teacher assesses your work?"

Category	Subcategory	Regular Education	Vocational Education	Total
Perceptions on teachers' feedback that students value	Self	41	0	41
	Task	14	18	32
	Process	0	0	0
	Self- regulation	4	39	43
Total		59	57	116
No answer		0	2	118

One can see that there are differences in the students' perceptions about what they value regarding the teachers' feedback, depending on the students' educational context, in Table 1. Most of the students in regular education (N=41) value the teacher's feedback focusing on the self, with comments such as: "(...) my work is well done, but I can do better next time (encourages me)" (N=27); "(...) recognize my commitment (...)" (N=9); "(...) I worked hard, (...)" (N=5). Students in vocational education do not value teachers' feedback about the self. The task feedback is the second highest valued category of the vocational students. But this feedback type is only concerned with how well tasks are performed. All the students value the teachers' feedback in terms of: "(...) my work is well done" (N=18). The students in *regular education* value the teachers' feedback on task performance in emotional terms. The more frequent answers were: "(...) identify my mistakes (...)" value the positive aspects of my work (...) Fair and honest comments"" (N= 9); and in the same way as the *vocational students* described the task performance "(...) the work is well done!" (N=5). In regular education, self-regulation feedback is valued less than the first two: "I like to hear what I have to improve and how to do it." (N=4). In vocational education, most student's perceptions focused on self-regulation in which students like to know "(...) if I'm going well and what I should improve and the best way to do it" (N=39).

Table 2. Emergent categories: "What comments do you not value when a teacher assesses your work?"

Category	Subcategory	Regular Education	Vocational Education	Total
Perceptions on teachers' feedback that students not value	Self	37	25	62
	Task	17	26	43
	Process	0	4	4
	Self- regulation	0	1	1
Total		54	56	110
No answer		5	3	118

In Table 2 we can see the emergent categories related with the students' perceptions on the teachers' feedback that they do not value when a teacher assesses their work and there are similarities with the emergent categories in Table 1. The students in regular education value less the teachers' feedback related with self and task. In this sense, the feedback related with self is not valued because students says: "(...) I do not like unfair, unreasonable or arrogant comments (...)" where they only value the negative aspects and forget the positive aspects (...) that leave me with a feeling of low self-esteem." (N= 20) and also "(...) I could have done better when I tried my best" (N= 17). Task feedback was not valued by 17 students in regular education: they do not appreciate comments like: "The

work is badly done" (N=17). Similarly, the majority of the students in vocational education do not value teacher feedback concerned with the self and task. In this educational context, students do not appreciate comments like: "I could have better when I tried my best" (N=14) or comments which students generally could be "(...) humiliated" (N= 11). They also do not like comments related with the task: "The work is badly done" (N=26). A small number of students relate the teachers' feedback with self-regulation and process. These students said they do not appreciate comments like "(...) the work is bad and do not help to improve." (Self-regulation, N=1) and some said they enjoy all kind of negative comments "(...) since they are related to the work" (Process, N=4)

4. Discussion and conclusions

The students had specific preferences in relation to the teachers' feedback that they do or do not value when a teacher assesses their work and some of these differences were related to the type of feedback provided and to the educational school context. Feedback generally has positive effects in classroom interventions (Brookhart, 2008), as practical educational guidance, for promoting career development (Martins & Carvalho, 2012a, 2012b). This idea is especially valid in vocational education. The analysis (Bardin, 2011) of the student's answers clustered their perceptions in four types of feedback: self, task, process and self-regulation, in agree with in agree with the model of Hattie and Timperley (2007). In regular education, the majority of students valued the teacher feedback on self level, which expresses positive assessments on the work done and on student commitment. These students not value teacher feedback that does not enable positive assessments on their self-esteem or their work. These students not value teacher feedback that does not enable positive assessments on their self-esteem or their work. In vocational education, the students valued the feedback about self-regulation, where they can obtain information to monitor their work. In the regular education and the vocational education, the students not valued teacher's feedback about self and the task that discourages students to future performance, since they can avoid the risks or the efforts involved in new learning challenges. As in previous studies (Martins & Carvalho, 2013; Hattie & Timperley, 2007; Hattie, 2009), it was possible to confirm that the feedback is more effective when it is centered on the student's performance, and focused on ways to improve performance, being ineffective or less valued when it focused on students self characteristics. The apparent value of feedback is linked to how students perceive the way of teachers oversee some relevant problems, providing important and useful information about their school work (Hattie & Timperley, 2007). In this sense teachers' feedback type is essential: a) to improve learning needs, b) to give the students the information to understand what to do and why, and c) to develop feelings of control over their own learning (Brookhart, 2008). This educational guidance practice is important for student's school commitment and to avoid the risks of premature school dropout. The Teacher feedback, as an educational guidance practice in a school context, has numerous advantages in personal and social student's development. For many students, the school can be an unique opportunity to construct a vocational identity (Taveira, 2000, 2004). Consequently, this educational guidance practice, in addition to guide students in positive school trajectories, allows students to have vocational perspectives to develop sustainable life projects (Savickas, 2012).

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